

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 220154

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TO USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY

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NODIS

CHEROKEE

GENEVA EYES ONLY FOR DEPASSTSEC SAUNDERS

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 3621 ACTION SECSTATE SEP 16.

QUOTE: S E C R E T DAMASCUS 3621

NODIS CHEROKEE

DEPT PASS NEA DEPASSTSEC SAUNDERS IN GENEVA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS, US, EG

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH FONMIN KHADDAM, SEPTEMBER 15

1. SUMMARY: KHADDAM CONTINUES TO ARGUE SINAI ACCORD IS BAD FOR US AND ARABS AND THAT MAJOR US AID PROGRAM FOR ISRAEL WORKS AGAINST PEACE. AT SAME TIME HE APPEARS MORE RECEPTIVE TO IDEA THAT SYRIA SHOULD BEGIN DEVELOP ITS OWN NEGOTIATING POSITION RE GOLAN. END SUMMARY

2. KHADDAM TOLD ME SEPTEMBER 15 HE HAD COMPLETED HIS PLANNED TRAVELS OUTSIDE OF SYRIA TO DISCUSS SINAI ACCORD AND EXPECTED REMAIN IN DAMASCUS UNTIL DEPARTING FOR
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 220154

UNGA IN NEXT SEVERAL DAYS. ASKED TO COMMENT ON HIS

RECENT CONTACTS IN GULF, SAUDI ARABIA AND NORTH AFRICA, KHADDAM SAID HE HAD RETURNED "SATISFIED." REACTION ELSEWHERE IN ARAB WORLD, HE CLAIMED, PARALLELED THAT IN SYRIA, I.E., EGYPT HAD SIGNED THE WORST OF AGREEMENTS AND SADAT HAD "GIVEN EVERYTHING AWAY." HE WARMED TO THEME THAT AGREEMENT WAS BAD FOR US AS WELL AS ARAB INTERESTS. POINTING TO SEPT 15 DEMONSTRATION IN KUWAIT AS EVIDENCE OF AROUSED STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION, HE SAID WE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN ARAB PUBLIC WOULD NOT TOLERATE SUCH ARRANGEMENTS.

3. REPLIED I HAD DIFFICULTIES UNDERSTANDING WHAT HE AND OTHER ARAB LEADERS MEANT WHEN THEY COMPLAINED USG FAILED TO SERIOUSLY ARAB PUBLIC OPINION. IN COUNTRIES WHERE GOVERNMENTS SO DOMINATED EVENTS IT WAS HARD FOR US OUTSIDERS TO MEASURE REVERSE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC ON LEADERS. RE KUWAIT DEMONSTRATIONS, SAID I UNDERSTOOD PLO REP HAD BEEN SENT FROM BEIRUT TO DO THE PLANNING. ACKNOWLEDGED SOME PRIVATE SYRIAN CITIZENS HAD TOLD ME OF THEIR SHOCK AT EGYPTIAN SIGNATURE. HOWEVER, I TENDED TO SEE THEIR UNHAPPINESS AS IN LARGE PART A RESULT OF THEIR REALIZATION THE FIRST STEP HAD BEEN TAKEN TOWARDS PEACE. HOWEVER WELCOME PEACE WAS AS GENERAL PRINCIPLE TO ALL PARTIES, EGYPTIAN SIGNATURE MARKED BEGINNING OF PROCESS WHICH WOULD REQUIRE ARABS TO BREAK WITH A GENERATION-OLD ASSUMPTION THAT ISRAEL HAD NO FUTURE IN THE AREA. SUCH AN ADAPTION WAS PSYCHOLOGICALLY PAINFUL.

4. KHADDAM THEN REFERRED TO REPORTS OF TWO BILLION DOLLARS IN PROJECTED US ANNUAL AID TO ISRAEL ASKING HOW WE COULD SERIOUSLY ARGUE WE WERE HELPING THE AREA TOWARDS PEACE. I REPLIED THAT US WAS OBVIOUSLY MORE DEEPLY AND INTENSIVELY INVOLVED IN THE NEAR EAST TODAY THAN IT HAD BEEN BEFORE OCTOBER WAR; SUGGESTED HE CHEW ON THOUGHT THAT IT JUST MIGHT BE NECESSARY FOR US TO GET IN DEEPER BEFORE WE COULD EXTRICATE OURSELVES BY ACHIEVING A SETTLEMENT. (FONMIN INTERJECTED THIS ARGUMENT WAS AGAINST ALL LOGIC.) HE COULD BE SURE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY WILL USE OUR MAJOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR ISRAEL TO EDUCATE US PUBLIC OPINION ON THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE POLICY. KHADDAM IN TURN QUOTED ARAB FABLE ABOUT MOTHER WITH HUNGRY CHILDREN AND NO FOOD. TO KEEP THEM FROM CRYING SHE HAD
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 220154

COOKING POT PERMANENTLY ON THE BOIL, FILLED WITH PEBBLES. "US POLICY IN THE ME IS SIMILARLY TRYING TO TRANQUILIZE THE PEOPLES OF THE AREA WITHOUT GIVING THEM REAL HELP." ASKED IF HIS "PEOPLES" INCLUDED ISRAELIS, HE SAID, YES, BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE THE FINAL LOSERS.

5. HE THEN MUSED THAT CAMELS WERE SYMBOLS OF THE ARABS

FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD AND THE CAMEL'S PRINCIPAL QUALITY WAS PATIENCE. ARABS, TOO, WOULD BE PATIENT. I SAID PATIENCE AND CALM WERE NEEDED BUT SO WERE IDEAS FOR FURTHER MOVEMENT IN THE AREA. US HAD NO MONOPOLY ON IDEAS FOR NEXT STEPS. REMINDED HIM THAT SECRETARY HOPES FOR AND HAS INVITED IDEAS FROM SYRIANS ON HOW TO KEEP MOVEMENT GOING. DE BORCHGRAVE HAD INFORMED ME THAT, IN HIS SEPT 13 MEETING WITH ASAD, PRESIDENT HAD TOLD HIM SYRIA HAD NOW LAUNCHED ITS OWN POLICY REASSESSMENT. WHEN WOULD THEIR REASSESSMENT BE COMPLETED? HE REPLIED, "WHEN THE PRESIDENT FINISHES IT." (COMMENT: A NEAT SUMMING UP OF SYRIAN POLICYMAKING PROCESSES.)

6. KHADDAM CONTINUED, "YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT OUR IDEAS ARE FROM WHAT PRESIDENT TOLD SECRETARY ON SEPTEMBER 3." I SAID THAT I WAS SPEAKING WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS BUT IT APPEARED TO ME NEITHER SYRIANS NOR ISRAELIS HAD YET PRODUCED CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DIPLOMATIC ACTION. IT WAS RELATIVELY EASY TO SUM UP WHAT ISRAEL MIGHT WANT RE GOLAN BUT THIS WAS NO PRESCRIPTION FOR FURTHER MOVEMENT. SIMILARLY, FOR ARABS JUST TO CRITICIZE SADAT WAS NO PRESCRIPTION FOR ACTION. KHADDAM RESPONDED THAT HE DOUBTED IT MATTERED WHAT SYRIA DID BECAUSE, AS US SPOKESMEN THEMSELVES SO OFTEN POINTED OUT, USG WAS ALREADY PARALYZED BY UP-COMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. I SAID THIS WAS UNTRUE; ELECTIONS WERE OVER A YEAR AWAY; THIS CONCEPT OF PARALYSIS WAS MUCH EXAGGERATED BY JOURNALISTS AND SYRIANS SHOULD NOT KEEP ASSUMING US POLITICAL PARALYSIS. WE WANTED KEEP MOVEMENT AND WE HOPED HE WOULD COME TO SEE SINAI ACCORD AS WE DID AS A FIRST STEP. ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL IN CONDITIONS OF PEACE WAS SOMETHING NEW IN ME HISTORY.

7. I SAID IN CONCLUSION THAT ASAD'S POINT MADE BOTH TO BBC TV INTERVIEWR (DAMASCUS 3548) AND TO DEBORCHGRAVE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 220154

(DAMASCUS 3589) THAT NO ONE SHOULD TAKE SYRIA'S FUTURE POLICY FOR GRANTED HAD LONG BEEN UNDERSTOOD IN WASHINGTON. ADDED "IT IS BECAUSE WE DO NOT TAKE YOU FOR GRANTED THAT WE ARE ASKING FOR YOUR IDEAS." SAID THAT I HOPED OVER NEXT WEEKS WE WOULD HAVE A GENUINE EXCHANGE ABOUT FURTHER DIPLOMATIC MOVES. KHADDAM WAS NONCOMMITTAL BUT APPEARED TO AGREE.

8. COMMENT: JUDING BY ASAD'S OFF-THE-RECORD COMMENTS TO DE BORCHGRAVE RE WAR SCENARIO, WHICH INCLUDES INTRODUCTION OF SOVIET TROOPS TO SYRIA (DAMASCUS 3592), IT APPEARS THAT IN TERMS OF SYRIAN REASSESSMENT THERE ARE NO UNTHINKABLE THOUGHTS. HOWEVER, AFFIRMATIONS IN WASHINGTON AND CAIRO THAT SYRIA'S TURN IS NEXT, THAT TALKS WILL BEGIN IN MID-OCTOBER, THAT US WILL NOT PERMIT ISRAEL TO ATTACK SYRIA, ETC. ARE PROBABLY

HELPING BOX SYRIANS INTO CONTINUING DIALOGUE WITH US.
AT SAME TIME THESE STATEMENTS ARE PROMPTING RESENTFUL COMMENTS
THAT NO ONE SHOULD TAKE SYRIA'S POSITION FOR GRANTED.

9. THIS MEETING, AT MY REQUEST, WAS INTENDED PRIMARILY AS A
HANDHOLDING EXERCISE IN LINE WITH SECRETARY'S PARTING INJUNCTION
SEPT 3 TO "TRY TO KEEP THEM CALM." I FOUND KHADDAM MORE EQUABLE
IN THIS MEETING THAN HE HAD BEEN IN OUR LAST SESSION SEPT 4.
FONMIN FOR ONE, HOWEVER, REMAINS HIGHLY SCEPTICAL USG SERIOUSLY
INTENDS TO INVEST MUCH EFFORT ON SYRIA'S BEHALF.
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